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NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW.

No. XXXV.

NEW SERIES, No. X.

APRIL 1822.

ART. XIV.—*The Comedies of Aristophanes. By T. Mitchell, A. M. late fellow of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge. Vol. I. London, 1820.*

IT cannot, of course, have escaped the notice of our readers, that the character of Aristophanes and the remains of his comedies have of late attracted much attention abroad. The way was prepared for the volume, of which we have just named the title, by a very elaborate and able essay on the Grecian philosophy and the Clouds of Aristophanes, in the Quarterly Review for September 1819. The same topics or kindred discussions on the manners of the Athenians, to which the remains of the ancient comedians furnished abundant materials, have also been admirably treated, in subsequent numbers of the same journal. With this preparation, the first volume of Mitchell's Aristophanes came forth, and was, on its appearance, most ably noticed in the Quarterly and Edinburgh Reviews; and we venture to say, that through the medium of these popular vehicles of information, more knowledge of the Greek comedy and of its literary remains has been diffused throughout the reading community, both in England and in this country, than was ever before accessible to any but professed scholars, and those of laborious research. Did we not think that some important errors had also been diffused through

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these same vehicles, we should have esteemed it altogether a work of supererogation, to ask the attention of our readers anew to a subject made so familiar to them, by the journals just mentioned. But feeling ourselves wholly unprepared to go to the extreme of the new school on this topic, we have ventured to appeal to the attention of the American literary public, with not a little fear, however, that their curiosity is nearly exhausted.

What the commonly received opinion of Aristophanes is or was, we scarcely need say. So learned and elegant a scholar, as bishop Hurd, calls him, 'that buffoon.' Dr Gillies, who, if his own taste be entitled to no preeminent respect, may be considered as an adequate representative of the taste of his contemporaries, speaks of Aristophanes, as 'one of a class of men, who were the declared enemies, not only of Socrates and his disciples, but of all order and decency;' adding in the course of the same chapter, 'that Aristophanes and his associates, having previously ridiculed virtue and genius, in the persons of Socrates and Euripides, boldly proceeded to avail themselves of the natural malignity of the vulgar, and their envy against whatever is elevated and illustrious, to traduce and calumniate Pericles himself; and though his successors in the administration justly merited the severest lashes of their invective, yet, had their characters been more pure they would have been equally exposed to the unprovoked satire of those insolent buffoons, who gratified the gross appetites of the vulgar, by an undistinguished mass of ridicule, involving vice and virtue, things profane and sacred, men and gods.*' La Harpe, in his agreeable chapter on the Greek comedy, inclines to adopt the opinion of Plutarch against Aristophanes, expressed in his famous comparison between this master of the old comedy and Menander, to which comparison we shall revert, in the course of our observations. In obstinately adhering, however, to the epithet of *satirist*, applied to Aristophanes, and considering him in that character alone, La Harpe gives a striking instance of his own habitually superficial views. The conception which Barthelemi appears to have formed of the comedian, (though somewhat disguised by the oppressive fictions, with which he carries on the plot of his Anacharsis, to the irreparable injury of what would else have been so perfect a work,) is in the main rational, and appears to have been

* Gillies' History of Greece, chap. xiii.

formed from a fair examination of the contrasts in his character. From this opinion, Mr A. W. Schlegel dissents. Having remarked in the text, that ‘care must be had not to regard the *old comedy* as the rude beginning of the subsequently more improved comic representation,’ he adds in a note, that the chapter in the *Anacharsis* is composed on this idea of the ancient comedy, and then pronounces this chapter one of the most unsatisfactory and unsuccessful in the work. This, however, we do not admit :—Barthelemi is a stranger to those penetrating views of antiquity, which have been taken by the new school in Germany, and by none more successfully than Mr Schlegel ; but we do not perceive any remarkable deficiency in the chapter in question. How far back the following judgment of professor Dalzel is to be dated, the nature of the work, from which it is taken, does not enable us to ascertain. It has excited our surprise, however, to find a judgment so extremely old-fashioned, not to say superficial, in a work published during the last year. His words are, ‘we have a considerable number of the comedies of Aristophanes still remaining, but they are so full of ribaldry and buffoonery, that I can scarcely recommend them to your perusal, unless on account of the Attic Greek, in which they are written.—I have already observed, that at Athens, there were people of every sort of character. Among the lower sort there were great numbers, remarkable for their vanity and inconstancy, their want of respect for religion, their insolence and vice of every sort, and readier to laugh at a coarse and immoral joke, than to be instructed by useful truth. It was to people of this stamp that Aristophanes chose to address himself. He was malignant and satirical, and, at the same time, had a gayety of wit, which recommended him to the mob. The comedies of Aristophanes then ought to be considered as abuses of this sort of composition.’* Whatever be thought of the justice of this, as far as the character of Aristophanes is concerned, we do not remember to have seen a more striking example of vagueness and feebleness, than these few lines betray ; and we are sorry to add, they afford but too faithful a sample of a work, from which we had promised ourselves instruction and pleasure.

We have gathered together these few judgments on the subject of Aristophanes, for the sake of reminding our readers more exactly of the prevailing tone of opinion, before it had

* Dalzel's Lectures, vol. ii. p. 146.

been, in very late times, a little shaken ; and for this reason, we have chosen popular writers, rather than professed critics. We come now to the reverse of the picture. The close of the last century in Germany was signalized by two things in the study of ancient literature apparently disconnected, nay opposite in their nature, but each pushed, and often by the same individual, to a distinguished point of excellence ;—we mean, on the one hand, minute, grammatical, and verbal study of the ancient remains, rivalling, if not exceeding, the most painful school of Dutch philology ; and on the other hand, the most keen and philosophical spirit, penetrating into the inmost character of the ancient literature, and scrutinizing the condition in which its monuments exist, with a severity before unapproached. Bentley alone, of all the preceding critics, had given a foretaste of this admirable compound of humble erudition and soaring criticism, and it is painful to consider that this divine scholar was the subject of all the obloquy and hatred, nay, of the affected contempt of his colleagues. It was reserved for a subsequent age to do him justice ; and it has abundantly done it : and no one now, who traces his ancestry to England, and whose taste is devoted to the Grecian muses, but blushes to think that the names of Bentley and Boyle were ever coupled as antagonists. But though Bentley certainly exhibited, in a most eminent degree, this union of accurate verbal knowledge, with a comprehensive philosophical spirit, which has never been surpassed, it died with him. It was not truly revived in the Dutch school, illustrious as that has been for its three generations of scholars like Hemsterhuis, Ruhnken, and Wyttenbach ; who, like the great tragical triumvirate at Athens, have left worthy disciples indeed, but no equal successors. In Germany, however, in the latter part of the last century, an entire reform was introduced into the study of antiquity and its remains. And while the foundation was laid in a most laborious grammatical study, the superstructure was carried up in the boldest, most elevated, and adventurous spirit of criticism. Hence those discussions of the authenticity of Homer, which have given such an original turn to half the science of philology ; discussions not so much as glanced at in Prof. Dalzel's lectures on Homer ; hence, those refined disquisitions on the ancient philosophy, those admirable lights, which the monuments of ancient literature and ancient art have been made to throw on each other ;

and hence, finally, the extraordinary precision and discrimination, with which the single ancient authors have been characterized, and which has taken place, we trust for ever, of that loose and indistinct tone of pedantic admiration, in which it was the fashion to praise ancient authors of all ages and characters, to the same degree, and almost in the same words. In this new school, it is, that an attempt, bold, ingenious, we know not if we ought to add successful, has been made to reverse the popular judgments, with regard to Aristophanes. The Schlegels may be considered as those, who have been most distinctly the organs of the learned, in promulgating this new opinion. The following extract from the lectures of F. Schlegel will be new to few of our readers, having been already quoted in this discussion, but it is necessary here to repeat it, for the sake of distinctness. After a number of fine preparatory remarks, he observes, that

‘in language and versification the excellence of Aristophanes is not barely acknowledged—it is such as to entitle him to take his place, among the first poets to whom Greece has given birth. In many passages of serious and earnest poetry which, thanks to the boundless variety and lawless formation of the popular comedy of Athens, he has here and there introduced, Aristophanes shows himself to be a true poet, and capable, had he so chosen, of reaching the highest eminence, even in the more dignified departments of his art. However much his writings are disfigured by a perpetual admixture of obscenity and filth—and however great a part of his wit must to us, in modern times, be altogether unintelligible, and after deducting from the computation every thing that is either offensive or obscure, there will still remain to the readers of Aristophanes a luxurious intellectual banquet of wit, fancy, invention and poetical boldness. Liberty, such as that of which he makes use, could indeed have existed no where, but under such a lawless democracy as that, which ruled Athens, during the life of Aristophanes. But that a species of drama originally intended solely for popular amusement in one particular city, should have admitted or hazarded so rich a display of poetry, this is a circumstance which cannot fail to give us the highest possible idea, if not of the general respectability, at least of the liveliness, spirituality, and correct taste of the populace, in that remarkable State, which formed the focus and central point of all the eloquence and refinement, as well as of all the lawlessness and all the corruption of the Greeks.’
F. Schlegel's Lectures, Vol. I, p. 59.

After this defence of the poetical character of Aristophanes, the learned Austrian proceeds to assert his political independence and merit as a citizen, a point to which we may perhaps return, but on which we will not now linger. This quotation may be taken as an adequate representative of the opinion cherished of Aristophanes, by the new school in Germany. Wieland is the last perhaps who has viewed him in the ancient, unfavorable light; for writers like Fuhrmann and even Harles can hardly be quoted as of authority, in so delicate a discussion as this. That a doctrine so new, so plausible, and, if we may be pardoned the phrase, so paradoxical, should have found favor in Germany, was not surprising. There is an intensity of the speculative principle, and a forgetfulness of the practical in the German character, which are continually producing similar results. But it is a phenomenon, without many parallels, that these views should have found such a welcome in England. Till the days of Porson, Aristophanes had been but little studied in that country. The labors of Dawes had been principally confined to the correction of the text, especially by the application of his beautiful canon with respect to the optative mode and imperfect tense, in which he has been so admirably borne out by the text of the Ravenna MS.* Cumberland's labors on the Greek comedy, and Aristophanes in particular, in his *Observer*, were not certainly of a kind to put the student on any new track in his researches into this obscure department; and the labors of Porson on this author having been for the most part unfortunately lost by the burning of his copy of Aristophanes,† failed to produce their whole effect in turning the attention and zeal of his school to these remains. By what accident then Mr Mitchell was led to so careful a study of them, as he has made, we are not able to say, nor by what uncommon causes he has been induced to embrace in its fullest extent, nay, to exceed in extravagance, one of the theories of the German school, which we should have thought least calculated for the English taste. For ourselves, we regard the learning of the Germans with highest admiration, and look on them as the authors and masters of the true school of ancient literature. We can, however, specify but few points, where we do not think they have pushed their

* See Dawesii Misc. Crit. Ed. Kidd. Indic. p. 636.

† See Porsoni Aristophanica: Ed. Dobree Præfat. ii. and Kiddii Præf. ad Porson. Opusc. p. xxxix, which is referred to by Mr Dobree.

fine speculations too far; and where, having begun with the most sharp-sighted rectification of popular errors—of errors sanctioned by a prescription, which it is an equal proof of courage and learning to assail—they do not end by being carried into an extreme, in which they can be neither safely imitated by others, and in which they are not very consequent, always, themselves. A remarkable instance of this is presented in those most profound, original, and interesting speculations on the authenticity of the poems of Homer, which were first effectually started by Wolf. So long as he confined himself to enforcing the portentous improbability that two poems, each of twenty-four books of a texture so artificial and elaborate as that of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, should have been produced before alphabetical writing was in general use, and while recitation was the only instrument, and festivals the only occasion of publication, (an instrument and an occasion, which of themselves exclude even the conception of poems so long), while he confined himself to these points, the learned world were enchanted with the wisdom and sagacity, the conclusiveness, and the erudition which marked his argument.—Mised, however, by his success, he aimed at something higher, and formed in his mind an obscure image of a literary phenomenon so paradoxical and wild, that were it not heralded in with the most select and exquisite learning, no good taste would even pause to examine it; viz. the idea that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are a fortuitious accumulation of ancient poems never written as parts of one work, but the production of different ages, authors, and countries. We say he formed in his mind an *obscure* image of this theory, for no where does he distinctly state, and never has he in terms defended it. But it is plain to see that his mind does fondly dally with such a philological sorceress; and his enemies and his indiscreet admirers (those worst enemies of a daring mind) familiarly attribute to him ‘*a plurality of Homers*.’* Though, after long labouring under this

* Mr Campbell, in his lectures on poetry, thus expresses himself.—‘The idea of one author having composed either of the two great poems, that pass under Homer’s name, has been violently controverted in recent times, and a general scepticism has been diffused on this subject by the learning of Wolf and Heyne. These great men have had antagonists, it is true, but none that were worthy *Ἀντίστοιχον μάχεσθαι ἐν αἰνῇ διανοήῃ*, till our own countryman Payne Knight, vindicated the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, from the imputation of having been patched into beauty and unity, by a crowd of equivocal rhapsodists.’ Mr Campbell then adds, in a note to this passage, that ‘Mr Knight is so far a dis-

imputation, or enjoying this reputation, you are astonished to find that he no where distinctly asserts the theory in question, and that when forced to make a categorical statement of his doctrine, he ventures no farther than to teach that the *present form* of the Iliad and Odyssey, the division into the twenty-four books, the insertion of some of the episodes, with numerous scattered lines throughout, are to be ascribed to the rhapsodists and grammarians; that these poems were originally in a shorter and simpler form; and that there is no historical certainty about the person of Homer.* We forbear to enlarge on this interesting topic, as we wish to take an early opportunity of laying before our readers a full account of this curious controversy. We have alluded to it now, in confirmation of our remark, that the Germans are not only prone to push their learned and ingenious speculations to an extreme, whither it is unsafe to follow them, but where they themselves are not sure, to be fully persuaded in their own minds. The case of Aristophanes appears to us another example in point. They found out, that instead of being merely a ribald and a buffoon, he was a poet of true and lofty vein. Thus much was finely illustrated; but then they, or their colleagues in England, would prove that he was not chargeable at all with the vice of indecency as a personal blemish, but that he spoke merely in the

sender from the old opinion, that he conceives the Iliad and Odyssey to contain internal marks of separate authors; and he admits that both have many interpolations. But the admission of both those two suppositions is a very different innovation on our accustomed ideas, from supposing such a work as the Iliad to have been a work of medley production and fortuitous design.¹ We design, as we have intimated in the text, to take an early opportunity of returning to this subject, and treating it at length. Meantime, if Mr Campbell will carefully weigh the closing remark in the preface to the edition of the Iliad, published by Wolf in 1795, we think that he will admit with us, that the theory of Wolf, in its deliberate statement, does not differ essentially from that of Mr Knight.

* The following is the passage from the preface of Wolf, alluded to in the preceding note.

‘ Nam quoniam iisdem rationibus, quibus reliquæ suspiciones nituntur, *certum est*, tum in Iliade tum in Odyssea *orsam telam et deducta aliquatenus fila esse a VATE, qui princeps ad canendum accesserat*; (illuc autem non potuit ipse non trahi serie cycli Troiani et studiis auditorum et proprii ingenii magnitudine) forsitan ne probabiliter quidem demonstrari poterit, a quibus locis potissimum nova subtemina et limbi procedant: at id tamen, ni fallor, poterit effici, ut liquido appareat, *Homero nihil præter maiorem partem Carminum tribuendum esse*, reliqua Homeridis, præscripta lineamenta persequentibus; mox novis et insignibus studiis ordinata scripto corpora esse a Pisistratidis, variisque modis perculta posthac a *διασκευασταῖς*, in levioribus quibusdam rebus etiam a criticis, a quorum auctoritate hic vulgatus textus pendet.’

tone of the age, nay, that he struggled to rise above it. They found out that, instead of being a malignant flatterer of a base populace, as he is described in some of the quotations at the head of our article, he was the fearless denouncer of abuses both low and high, and ventured to drag upon the stage, in the most opprobrious, contemptuous, and hateful light, Cleon, the leader and idol of this people, to whose malignity he is charged with pandering. But not content with asserting this, it is also maintained that he was positively good tempered, diffident, and amiable in his character, and was actuated by no motives of personal enmity, in his most virulent personal attacks. Lastly, while it is justly maintained that in his clouds, he was actuated by an intrepid and noble purpose of rendering the Sophists odious and ridiculous, and exploding their pernicious principles, it is maintained, as it seems to us in the wildest spirit of paradox, that in making Socrates the hero of this piece, who was not only no sophist himself, but devoted his life to refuting and exposing them—he was actuated by no ill will towards this philosopher, but laboured under a mistake, or wished to correct some foibles which Socrates really possessed, or we know not what—for this is the portion of the theory, which wraps itself in obscurity. As the Wolfian school shrinks from asserting the downright plurality of Homers, so the Aristophanic champions appear to dread the inevitable consequence of their justification of the comedian, viz. the corruption of Socrates. Though Mr Mitchell and the quarterly reviewer play and play about this dark suggestion, as if attracted to it by a horrid fascination, and flutter over it like the bird over the serpent coiled round her nest, our learned and eloquent brother of the Edinburgh more boldly says,—

‘ But while Mr Mitchell contends that proofs have been displayed by him, “ that the character of Socrates is a little more open to remark, than some admirers, in their ignorance, are aware of, and more than some, in their knowledge, are willing to bring to notice,” he seems, like the executioner of Marius, so struck with the dignity of his victim, so awed by the splendid powers of Socrates, and the sublimity of some of the doctrines he unfolds, that he has no heart to deal the final blow, or to press his assault so closely as he might have done. We confess that our nerves are much more hardy. We have not that respect for the whole fabric of ancient philosophy,—a fabric within whose dark cells the genius of VIRGIL had so nearly been immured, to waste its radiance

like a lamp in a sepulchre—a philosophy in physics so wildly visionary, so indolently satisfied with unexperimental error,—in ethics so perplexed, so fluctuating, so unsatisfactory, which can make us tremble to approach its shrine with any thing short of the incense of adulation, or regret to see the hollowness and contradictions of the principles upon which it proceeded exposed, even in the speculations of him, who went so much further in his advances toward truth than any other of his countrymen.’—*Edinburgh Review* for November 1820.

We think there is however a softening of tone even in this passage ; and without calling in question the firmness of our brother’s nerves, we fancy we see them shaking a little, as he winds up with ‘ going so much further in his advances toward truth, than any other of his countrymen.’ We do not mean to embarrass our discussion now with the question of the morals of Socrates. His purity is not the point now under our consideration. We speak of the paradoxical nature of that hypothesis, which maintains that Aristophanes did not mean to assail his purity ; and we show its vagueness and the irresolution of its friends, by pointing out how they acquit Aristophanes, at one moment, of the design of attacking the philosopher, and the next, attempt darkly or boldly to intimate, that he was the fair object of the attack. This shows some defect in the theory ; at present we choose to believe that this defect is, that it sacrifices Socrates to Aristophanes. We are not yet prepared to awaken from the vision of veneration, in which we have so long indulged, and that for the sake of turning one, who had borne so general a reputation as a cruel and indecent libeller, into an angel of light, a champion of truth, and a preacher of righteousness : we are not yet ready to immolate the character of the heathen saint, for the sake of establishing the purity of the author of the *Lysistrata*, or making it appear that he, who wrote the *Frogs*, was actuated by no personal hostilities.

But we propose to confine our remarks, on the present occasion, as far as we can, to the character and merits of Aristophanes, as maintained by the German scholars, and beyond them, and with singular unanimity and concert by the English. In fact, we have been tempted to these remarks, in no small degree, from the powerful effect, which may fairly be anticipated on the public taste, by this remarkable alliance. In general, the German *literati* find but little favor with their English

brethren; and we have commonly trusted to the latter to furnish something of a counterpoise to the speculative extravagance of the Germans, and thus make it easier for the philosophical student to preserve an impartial medium between them. But this controversy seems to have taken a turn calculated to bewilder those, who relied upon the insular critics as likely to preserve the balance of philology, against the continental. Mr Mitchell misses no opportunity of complimenting the latter; and he engrafts his whole preliminary discourse on a proposition of the Messrs Schlegel. Of Wieland, though he commends his taste in one place at the expense of 'his mad inconsistencies on matters of opinion,' he observes in another, that 'his extensive erudition and extreme impartiality make him a most invaluable assistant' to the translator of Aristophanes. Göthe, who was so piteously belabored in a review of his life in the Edinburgh, is by Mr Mitchell placed above Aristophanes, (and what higher praise could Mr M. award) even in the comic vein, and allowed to be beyond comparison with him in the higher tones of poetry: while he speaks of A. W. Schlegel, the author of the lectures on dramatic art, as 'an excellent writer, as warm in his feelings as he is correct and universal in his literature.' Our brethren of the Edinburgh Review express an admiration of the Messrs Schlegel equally unlimited, and they pronounce the field of the controversy 'holy ground,' for having been trodden by them. We are a little at a loss therefore, why they, being English writers, and speaking of German critics, should designate them by the French name of *Monsieur*, which will sound as oddly in the ears of those patriotic Germans, when they shall meet with the widely circulating pages of the Edinburgh Review, as it would to Mr Mitchell to hear himself called *mein herr* in a French, or Don Thomas in a German journal. We are much pleased, at any rate, with the high testimonies to the German scholarship, which the discussions of this topic have elicited, and would gladly regard it as an earnest of a more general acquaintance on the part of our transatlantic brethren, with the too much neglected literature of the most studious and speculative people of the modern world.

In treating the question of the character and merits of Aristophanes, as they have of late been so enthusiastically espoused, we shall follow the example of Mr Mitchell and his English reviewers. As these gentlemen have professed but to

illustrate and assert the theory of the Messrs Schlegel, we shall think we have done good justice to the opposite doctrine, if we shall succeed in laying before our readers the strength of the argument as contained in an admirable Essay of Wieland, on the question, ‘whether, and how far, Aristophanes is guilty or not of the charge of having treated Socrates with personal injustice in the *Clouds*.* It has excited some surprise in us, considering the opposite nature of the views of Wieland and Mr Mitchell, that the latter should content himself with dismissing the essay of Wieland in these terms : ‘Wieland has written an essay of considerable length on the subject of the differences between Socrates and Aristophanes. As his view of the subject is entirely different from the one here taken up, his line of argument is of course as different.’† This, we fear, will inadequately convey to the reader the information, that the view of Wieland is not merely different from that of Mr Mitchell, but opposite ; and his ‘line of argument’ not simply different, but contradictory.

We cannot deny our readers the gratification of seeing, in the strong language of Wieland, the precise nature of the question :

‘Socrates, a name, with which we are accustomed to associate the idea of whatever is most precious and venerable in man ; Socrates, of whom, even in his own day, the saying prevailed, that he was declared by the oracle at Delphi to be the wisest of men, who has been recognized as such by all succeeding ages, and to whom (if without any exaggeration we confine ourselves to the simple portraiture of his character, which two of his worthiest pupils have left us,) no one certainly, either before or after, can be preferred, as wiser or better ; this Socrates, in the forty-sixth year of his age, when every man in Athens must have known his real character, brought upon the public stage by the acknowledged prince of the Greek comedy, and held up as the most contemptible philosophical quack, the most ridiculous pedant, and the most shameless imposter, betrayer of the young, and foe of the national religion, as a man whose only wisdom consisted in empty subtleties, whims, plays upon words, and sophistical catches, is in truth a phenomenon, of the reality of which no historical testimony

* The title of the essay is ‘Versuch ueber die Frage ; ob und wie fern Aristofanes gegen den Vorwurf den Sokrates in den Wolken persönlich misshandelt zu haben, gerechtfertigt, oder entschuldigt werden könne.’ It is in the third volume of the *Attisches Museum*.

† Preliminary Discourse, p. cxx.

could have convinced us, had not the *Clouds* been one of the eleven comedies out of the fifty of Aristophanes, which are all that the muse of the Greek comedy has spared us from the general wreck of this department of literature. The question naturally arises on so singular a fact, a question which it has cost the learned, from the days of Plutarch and Ælian, and especially the enthusiastic admirers of Aristophanes, much pains to solve, how was it *possible* that a man, like Socrates, should be so treated by a man like Aristophanes! How could the sage, to be whose disciples Xenophon and Plato were proud, be so treated by a poet, in whose soul this same Plato found the most lasting temple of the graces! How could so noble and so good a man be so wholly misunderstood, so shamefully and cruelly injured by a contemporary and fellow citizen, whose works, to be sure, are filled with the monuments of his hostility against the bad, but who, with the exception of Socrates and Euripides, did injustice to no single person of acknowledged merit!

The question is here strongly but fairly stated, and if we mistake not, its very enunciation argues the fallacy of the course pursued by the champions of Aristophanes, in first attempting to soften the facts, and to shew that the substantial features of the Aristophanic Socrates may be found in the Socrates of Plato and Xenophon; and secondly, that Socrates really was the suspicious and ambiguous character, which Aristophanes would make him. It would, we think, have been wiser to accept thankfully the statement of Wieland; to rejoice that the phenomenon admitted of being made so hard of solution. The attempt to unite two theories so totally opposed, to say, on the one hand, that the *Clouds* is no calumny, for it was deserved by Socrates; and, on the other, that it is no calumny, because it is but another version of what the professed panegyrists and admiring scholars of Socrates assert, is to give the whole discussion an air so paradoxical and strange, that the honest inquirer, who engages in it on the ordinary principles of criticism, is perplexed and baffled.

It would be a happy thing, could we see the way clear to maintain with the worthy philosopher Panætius, that the Socrates mentioned by Aristophanes is another individual from him, whom we venerate in Xenophon and Plato. Since, however, we know nothing of the grounds, on which Panætius made this assertion, nor of the fact itself that he does make it, except from the passing remark of the scholiast, (*Frogs*, 1539–1547,) it is not safe to build upon it. We would only observe

that it seems to us one confirmation of the purity of the Platonic Socrates, that so respectable a writer as Panætius, living within three centuries of his time, should have resorted to so violent an hypothesis, as that the Aristophanic and Platonic Socrates were historically different individuals, rather than admit that the true Socrates could have suffered, or Aristophanes have perpetrated such outrage.

Wieland is inclined to consider this idea of Panætius as having furnished the first hint to the theory, which has been proposed in modern times, and to which we have alluded, that it was not Socrates, *personally*, whom Aristophanes assailed, but the sophists of Athens. After all that has been said of this class of persons in the *Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews*, and in an article in defence of Socrates in the *New Monthly Magazine* for the last year, we think it superfluous to detain our readers with any discussion of their character. We are not prepared, at present, to controvert the common opinions formed of it, and they do not need more ample illustration. But in these days, when a reputation, like that of Socrates, is called in odious question, and another, like that of Aristophanes, placed in a light the most imposing and respectable, we too may be pardoned for hinting, that we believe the picture of the sophists drawn by the writers of the Socratic school in antiquity, and by their admirers in modern times, is highly overcharged. Of the controversy between the sophists and philosophers we know nothing, but what the latter have told us. And we do not fear to appeal from their accounts to the common principles of human nature. These principles demand of us, first, not to place implicit reliance on what the members of hostile sects say of each other in any controversy; and secondly, not too readily to admit, what these philosophers and the learned critics in modern days would have us believe, that, in an age like that of Pericles, when the eyes of men were as wide open as they are now, a class of individuals, devoted to the intellectual career, professing all the liberal arts, respected in the politest cities of Greece, advanced in many of them to important public trusts, and charged in most of them with the education of the children of that rank in society best qualified to estimate, and best able to pay for a good education, that a class of individuals thus honored, in such an age, should be the unrighteous throng pretended. We will not pursue this suggestion now, having

started it, because we thought that we should seem out of fashion at the present day, when almost every man has a theory about Athens and the Athenians, if we did not set up a little paradox of our own.

Whatever may be thought of this, three reasons are given why Aristophanes, designing to assail the sophists, should have chosen to personify them in the character of Socrates :—1st, because the populace of Athens did regard Socrates as no better than a quibbling sophist :—2d, because Aristophanes did not dare lay hands on the known leaders of that school, such as Protagoras of Abdera, Polus of Agrigentum, Hippias of Elea, and Gorgias of Leontium, men of high standing in their several cities, and much esteemed at Athens, and that he regarded it as more prudent to fix on an obscure native citizen, whose singularities and affectation made him a fair subject of ridicule ; and, 3d, because Socrates omitted no occasion to testify his disapprobation of the character and productions of the comic theatre ; and thus provoked the personal hostility of Aristophanes.

To these reasons, we think, the most entire and perfect reply may be made.—To the first, that although the common Athenians might confound the keen Socratic method, with the quibbling dialectics of the sophists, Aristophanes was too sagacious to partake the error. If he knew enough of the man, to think him sufficiently notorious to be made the hero of his piece, and to be able to bring him in a bodily and mental caricature on the stage, he must have known also, that instead of being a sophist, he was the declared enemy of that class of men ; that he was pursuing them with the same zeal with which Aristophanes pursued him, and that half his instructions to his disciples, if the dialogues of Plato furnish a test, were made up of the exposure, refutation, and pursuit of the sophists. How then is it credible, that Aristophanes should have selected him as a representative of that class of men ? Here, therefore, we see the irrelevancy of what has been so forcibly and eloquently urged against their principles and character. Allow the sophists to be, as they are described, the most corrupt of corrupters, poisoners of the mind, betrayers of the rising generation, intellectual quacks, so much the more impossible was it for any one out of the dregs of the people to confound Socrates with them. The discreeter course would have been, on the part of the champions of Aristophanes, not to aggravate

the depravity of the sophists ; for in proportion as that is aggravated, men will be slow to think that Socrates, however far from perfect, could have been confounded by the lynx-eyed sagacity of Aristophanes with them ;—but, as we have done above, to hint that, after all, the sophists were not so very bad but that good men might be found in their ranks, and that, though some of their number might run into a depraved excess, yet that others were virtuous and enlightened. This would have been agreeable to those principles of human nature, at which we glanced above, and have found a striking parallel in the society of jesuits, in modern times ; a society which appears far differently in the *provincial letters*, and in the monuments of patient learning and the deeds of laborious charity throughout the globe, which have immortalized its members. It is true the difficulty would then have presented itself, not why Aristophanes should have so maltreated Socrates, but why he should have fallen so unmercifully on the sophists. This, however, would have been a difficulty far less considerable. The fairest men find no difficulty in representing the whole body of their opponents, in the most odious light. An opposite sect or party shall be held up to the bitterest scorn and detestation. Epithets shall be bestowed on it, which if just would make all whom it embraced of necessity most infamous ;—all the time that not a particle of *personal* hatred is felt against individuals, who are excluded by the saving qualification, that no personal allusion is designed.

The second reason why Aristophanes should have fixed on Socrates, as the representative of the sophists, viz. that he was afraid to attack the well known and powerful leaders of that school, Protagoras, Polus, and Gorgias, is extremely feeble.—‘ Where,’ says Wieland very justly, ‘ did Aristophanes get this timidity : he, who was not afraid, in the *Knights*, to make such a furious attack on one of the heads of the republic, an idol of the people, at the very zenith of his power ; he, who did not fear to introduce upon the stage, and expose to their own contempt, the sovereign people of Athens themselves, under the character of a pusillanimous and doting burgess ?’ This is to contradict the historical traits of the character of Aristophanes, and if the contradiction could with justice be made, if it could be proved that Aristophanus had this fear ; that not daring to assail the strong, he assailed the weak, not presuming to denounce the rich and popular stranger, he fell

upon the humble and obscure Athenian, not venturing actually to attack the sophists, by the names of their avowed leaders, he let loose all his acrimony on an eccentric humorist, whose singularities caused the mob to confound him with them, if this could be proved—whatever becomes of the character of Socrates, that of Aristophanes is made most contemptible.

But not more contemptible than it is made in the third reason given above, viz. that he cherished a personal enmity to Socrates, because the latter was hostile to the comic stage. To place a man like Socrates in so odious a light, as the hero of the *Clouds*, because he has expressed an opinion against the poet's profession, to make this personal quarrel the pretence for calumny so broad, coarse, and unsparing, and for persecution so malignant, is to confess its author to be poor-spirited in feeling and base in principle, beyond all that he has himself alleged against Socrates, or his defenders have maintained against the sophists.

The *Essay of Wieland*, to which we have appealed, and of which we are following the train, among its other merits has this, that it is a professed plea neither for Aristophanes nor Socrates; but an attempt philosophically and historically to explain the literary enigma, as announced at the beginning. The explanation may be reduced to these following points.—The popular comedy of Athens was an amusement of the mass of the citizens at their festivals, and particularly at the feasts of Bacchus. The comic poets were the ministers of the popular taste and feeling, and bound to provide topics for ridicule and laughter. The natural progress was from timid and general allusion, to direct personality, and lastly to systematic caricature of characters and persons on the stage. In proportion as this license increased, the nature of things demanded that it should have no effect, beyond that immediately designed, the amusement of a petulant populace. Where character is held sacred and personalities are forbidden either by public sentiment or law, a slight attack upon it awakens sensation, and must be submitted to or repelled, on the peril of retaining or forfeiting the public confidence. But where the license is familiar and notorious, and characters are habitually vilified, for no other reason than that they are notorious, and with no other object than to amuse the curiosity of an idle populace, then the instrument, once so powerful, loses its effect. ‘*Euripides*,’ says Wieland, ‘remained, notwithstanding the *Frogs*,
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and the Ecclesiastuzæ, one of the most favored and respected of the tragic poets ; and Nicias continued unshaken at the head of his party. Cleon, but shortly after the representation of the *Knights*, received the command of the army against Brasidas, and Hyperbolus, the eternal and the indiscriminate butt of the comedians, was named to the elevated post of Hieromnemon.' Nor was the case different with Socrates : though we sometimes see his final persecution and death ascribed in part to this attack of Aristophanes, it is to be recollected that *twenty-four years* elapsed between the acting of the *Clouds* and the prosecution by Anytus. When therefore we consider that whatever effect was produced on the public standing of Socrates by the *Clouds*, must have been greatest at the moment when the play was brought out,—the rather as the paucity of books limited to narrower bounds, than with our modern notions we are able to realise, the operation of literary agents,—we shall be inclined to admit, that the case of Socrates furnishes another illustration of the harmlessness of these attacks from the comic stage. Such being the nature of his weapon, used rather to divert the audience by its flourish and glitter, than to inflict mortal wounds by its edge, Aristophanes seized it, with his youthful grasp. What opinion we have of the motives, with which he might employ it, and of the feelings with which he would select his objects, will depend a good deal on the estimation which we form of the personal character of Aristophanes. We do not scruple to yield our entire assent to Wieland on this head. The ancient biographies give us little or no information on the subject ; nor is it doing Aristophanes or any man injustice to judge him by his works. We do not hesitate from these to deny him any title to our respect as a truly good man. In admiration of his talents, we yield to none. In relish for what is truly beautiful in his poetry, (and much of every sort of beauty may be found in it,) we would as little be thought to fail. We are by no means desirous to withhold our applause from the courage, with which he assailed some of the vices and vicious men of the day ; nor do we deny that his political and moral maxims are in the main sound. As a writer he is beyond praise, and the rather for having distrusted his own inspiration and his own popularity, and for having bestowed on his productions the most exemplary study and care. But here the tribute to his character, in our poor judgment, must stop. His writings are incontestably marked with an ir-

ritable, unreflecting, and remorseless temper. He often derides the distinction of true and false, and confounds them for the amusement of his audience. He indulges in bestialities so gross, that no change of times—no supposed peculiarity of ancient taste, can apologise for them, and he scorns and trifles with what other men held sacred, with a levity inconsistent with a good heart. A learned and sagacious critic has declared, that Aristophanes puts a violence on himself, and says, ‘It was not the bent of his mind to be immoral; though, like Swift, he might not care to wade through a little nastiness, for the sake of a joke. There is no *wallowing* in the mud, no indecency that clings to its ground, or reluctantly gives way, “with many a longing, lingering look behind.”’ We are constrained to differ, *in toto*, from this judgment. The fine strains are not the body and general tissue of the piece, blemished or even set off by the base foil. Aristophanes is ready at all moments, and on all occasions, to drop into hideous, indescribable, impious indecency. The modern book, which should only intimate his sins but for the sake of condemning them, would never be admitted into honest circulation. The modern scholar, who should dare to make a vernacular translation of the *Lysistrata*, would never be able to hold up his head in good company; and the printer, who should publish it, would be hunted down by the law. We are aware of the state of Athenian society. It was very different (heaven be praised) from our own. On looking into their classical authors of all departments, there is a certain tinge of grossness in them, which is not wicked; but appears to have had its origin in a general want of delicacy, and is to our minds far less offensive and pernicious, than the detestable inclination of Gibbon, on all occasions, to clothe indecent pleasantries in decent words. But this is all, we do not find, in the classical writings of the Greeks, the proofs of a state of manners, which furnish us any apology for the insane filthiness of Aristophanes. Homer, with the exception of a few broad phrases, which evidently *are* what the obscenity of Aristophanes evidently *is not*, the style of a rude and simple age, is highly pure; and yet the *Odyssey*, which carried the poet through so many scenes of private and domestic life, would have furnished abundant occasion for the opposite quality, had the taste of the times required it. It may be excepted to this example, that between the age of Homer and that of the Athenian democracy, the female character underwent an

unhappy change, and that his poems do not furnish the means of judging of the state of manners and taste, in the time of Aristophanes—which is partly just. Then we say that the contemporary literature, the history, the oratory, the tragedy of Athens, do not allow us to regard the general state of society as so corrupt, and the general state of literature so defective, as to authorize the indecency of Aristophanes. The comedy, we grant, is very different from the other branches of literature specified; it is more licentious in its nature. But if the defence be that the license was universal, something of it must be traced in *all* the literature; something must be found in every department, which bears the impress of this revolting sensuality. It is true, when we come down to a much later period, to a degenerate age of Greece; to an era alike of political slavery, literary decline, and moral corruption, we fall on a most depraved and impure taste, of which Athenæus, in his ordinary compilation, has collected monuments, that had better perished. But in defending Aristophanes, we have no more right to avail ourselves of the example of the miserable grammarians and epigrammatists, at a period subsequent by centuries to Aristophanes, than we have to quote against him the example of Homer from a period as much anterior. We just admitted that the latter cannot in justice be done, nor is there any more reason in the former. It is most unfortunate for this inquiry, that the works of the other ancient comedians are all lost; and that we are unable to compare Aristophanes with his predecessors or contemporaries, in the same department. If, however, we can appeal to the testimony of one of those who were able to make the comparison between Aristophanes and his contemporaries, of one who lived when the numerous authors of the ancient, middle, and new comedy, now lost, were yet extant, *he* certainly will be entitled to be heard with deference, in the question. Such a person is Plutarch, to whose diligence and philosophical curiosity we are indebted for the preservation of so many portions of Grecian history, and so many monuments and notices of Grecian manners, opinions, and literature. Among his moral works, as they are commonly but improperly termed, is the epitome of an essay containing an express and formal comparison between Aristophanes and Menander. It is much to be regretted that the entire work is lost. Still, however, there is no reason to distrust the justice of the abstract, which has come down to us.

From this abstract, we shall make a free but faithful quotation, just repeating, that Plutarch had the great mass of the comic literature open before him, and was able to estimate Aristophanes, in comparison with his colleagues; that it does not appear that Plutarch had any personal motive for doing Aristophanes injustice; and that, though he censures him extravagantly, it does not appear that he had any provocation thus to censure him beyond what was furnished by the works themselves of Aristophanes. 'At this period,' says Plutarch, 'that the city abounds with good actors of comedy, it is found that the comedies of Menander are replete with a spirit as innocent and even pious, as if it had its origin from the waves, whence Venus sprung. The spirit of Aristophanes, on the other hand, is bitter and harsh; it has a keen, biting, yea an ulcerating severity. Nor can I any where discern, either in the characters or language of his comedies, his boasted skill. What he imitates he debases. He represents not a polite but a malicious cunning; and his rusticity, instead of being confiding, is doltish. His humor is that not of laughter but derision, and his amours, instead of being gay, are profligate. The man seems not to have written for any person of discretion; but to have indulged in what is base and lascivious, that he might please the profligate, and in what is slanderous and bitter, that he might gratify the envious and malignant.—OP. II. 854.

This is the severe judgment of Plutarch, on the merits of Aristophanes. We may not choose to go the whole length of his condemnation, nor extend it to the literary merits of the poet. This is a point of taste, which we have a right to discuss with Plutarch. But as to his purity and impurity, which is not a matter of literary taste, but moral sentiment, and which we expressly refer to the standard of the age, to be settled by that, we maintain that Plutarch, with all the comic literature of the Greeks before him, and while instituting a formal comparison between Aristophanes and Menander, has a right to be heard.—We see not why he should not command our assent.

We have urged this topic, and have quoted this passage from Plutarch, for the sake of adding to the considerations, with which Wieland fortifies his opinion of the moral character of Aristophanes. In that opinion, we sincerely concur, and without wishing, with a puritanical sternness, to enter into judgment with the license, into which the pride of genius and

popularity in a lax age, and in unguarded moments, may have betrayed their possessors, are well persuaded that he is justly obnoxious to the charge of a corrupt moral taste, and a cold selfish heart. With these premises, in respect to the province assigned to the ancient comedy, its practical harmlessness, and the personal character of Aristophanes, our readers will be prepared for Wieland's last proposition, that though Aristophanes is neither to be justified nor excused for his attack on Socrates, he is not to be set down as of a spirit so remorseless, that he intended to pursue him to the death. On the other hand, the known inefficiency, to which the comedy had reduced itself as a means of affecting character, and the example of the most successful of the satires of Aristophanes, which had not cost their subjects the favor of the people, might have rendered the poet indifferent to the application he was making of it, in the case of Socrates, and so turn what many have considered blood-thirsty persecution, into mere selfish levity of spirit, which was willing to hold up to hatred and ridicule a man, whose outward singularities had made him a promising object of such an attack.

Such is the account which is given by Wieland, and which we have endeavoured to illustrate and strengthen. It would admit of various confirmation from other quarters. We might show that just such a course, as we conceive Aristophanes to have pursued toward Socrates, did he also pursue toward Euripides, the friend of Socrates; and the delight of all who are touched by the portraiture of the human heart. What could seemingly be more ferocious, than the tone and perseverance with which this last great member of the tragical triumvirate of Athens, is pursued by his satirical foe? What more inconsistent with real goodness of feeling and elevation of character? What more indicative of a cold, heartless, selfish reliance on his own skill and power, triumphing over that feeling of mutual dependence of man on man, which keeps men within bounds, and teaches them to attack, as those who may in turn be assailed? We might insist on this; and we might also enter upon the defence of Socrates, on the merits of his own character; a subject which, our readers perceive, we have hitherto left untouched. Did our limits now permit us, we should cheerfully do this; and we do not despair of an opportunity hereafter of submitting our thoughts upon it to the decision of our readers, confident as we are, that on *all* the points of doubt

in the character of Socrates, it admits of an explanation, consistent with his spotless purity. It may be thought but a faint championship to talk of *explanation*. But it is not often that human virtue admits of more, and it has been the fortune of Socrates, partly no doubt in consequence of the bad notoriety cast upon him by the play of the Clouds, to be more involved than could be wished in the suspicion of not having been wiser and better than his age in points, where he ought to have been, and we believe was, both.

We have been content to leave the correctness of the foregoing statements to the decision of our readers, without anxiously mustering the names of those, who patronize or refuting the objections of those, who call them in question. But inasmuch as the idea has been held up that the representation of the character of Socrates timidly hinted at by Mr Mitchell, and more boldly threatened by one of his reviewers, has received the unqualified support of the Messrs Schlegel in the same degree, in which the literary merit of the great comedian has been enforced by them, we think it necessary to add, that this too must be taken with qualification. We have already quoted some remarks of Mr F. Schlegel, which go only to maintain the poetical and patriotic character of Aristophanes, without justifying him in his warfare against Socrates. One of Mr A. W. Schlegel's lectures on dramatic art and literature is devoted to the subject of the ancient comedy; and in this, he represents the genius and character of Aristophanes, in the most favorable light. He does not, however, deny that his moral sentiment was corrupt, and he attributes his persecution of Socrates to personal enmity. In all that he says, it is plain that he treats the subject exclusively in its connexion with taste and criticism; and while we bow to his judgment in these departments, we are unwilling to admit, that a moral acquittal, were the Messrs Schlegel, as they are not, disposed to pronounce one, would come with any other force from these gentlemen, than what it would carry with it, in the reasons on which it is built. Whatever apology may be made for the impurity of Aristophanes, on the score of the low standard of morals in the age in which he lived, we apprehend that this apology can hardly be extended to the good natured toleration, with which his worst pieces are characterized in the lecture of Mr A. W. Schlegel alluded to: and we may be equally allowed to doubt, whether the author of the *Lucinda* is to be

admitted as a judge without appeal, on the morality of the author of the *Lysistrata*.

We have left ourselves scarce any room to speak of the work named at the head of our article, the first volume of Mr Mitchell's *Aristophanes*. This we have the less reason to regret, as our classical readers are already well possessed of its contents and character. The elaborate and ingenious preliminary discourse, consisting of *one hundred and sixty* pages, is, with a few slight alterations, the first article in the *Quarterly Review* for September 1819, there given as a review of Mr F. Schlegel's lectures. The reviews of Mr Mitchell's volume, in the *Quarterly* and *Edinburgh*, particularly the former, are so ample and satisfactory, and so generally in our readers' hands, that we think it superfluous to prolong our article. We cannot but enter our protest, however, against the mode of translating, which Mr Mitchell has adopted, in giving up, as it should seem, in despair, many passages equally susceptible, in his hands, with many that he has translated, of a pleasing English transfusion, and supplying their place by a cold analysis of their substance in prose. We trust Mr Mitchell has amended this matter in the continuation of his work, which we see announced in London, and which we beg leave to assure him is expected with impatience on this side of the Atlantic. When we are favored with it, we shall renew the consideration of the subject, and endeavor to render a more distinct testimony of our own to Mr Mitchell's felicity as a translator.

ART. XV.—*Herculanensium Voluminum quæ supersunt. Tomus II.* Neapoli, 1809. Fol.

THIS volume, the last which has been published by the Academicians of Portici, contains fragments of two books of *Epicurus de Natura*, being a portion of the treatise of thirty-seven books on this subject, ascribed by Diogenes Laertius to Epicurus. There are probably few of our readers, to whom the earlier history of the discovery, made of manuscripts, in the ruins of Herculaneum, is unknown. No event in modern times had excited greater interest in the literary world; and rarely has so lively an interest been succeeded, by such indifference. The causes of this indifference are obvious;—such as the time.